

# History Highlights

The South Mountains, carved out of the Blue Ridge by erosion, are a broad belt of peaks and knobs rising abruptly from a deep valley. These steep, rugged mountains encompass 100,000 acres in Burke, Cleveland and Rutherford counties.

The Catawba Valley and the gaps across the mountain ranges to the west were once major travel routes. The South Mountains served as a buffer zone between the Cherokee and the Catawba Indians, and the first European settlers in the area farmed the fertile land along the Catawba River.

In 1828, gold was discovered at Brindle Creek. Legend holds that gold flakes and grains were first discovered in the mud used to seal a log cabin. The ensuing gold rush attracted immigrants, mining companies and slave owners. Gold was mined into the early 20th century but activity in the gold mines eventually declined.

Development of land in what is now South Mountains State Park began in the 1930s when Camp Dryer, a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp, was established at Enola. Those employed at the camp constructed forest service roads, cleaned stream beds and built a fire tower. The Lower and Upper CCC roads are still in use as park trails.

The park was established as a result of recommendations made by a National Park Service study conducted in coordination with the State of North Carolina. Though proposals for the park began in the 1940s, it was not until 1974 that funds were appropriated to purchase the land. The first land acquisition, made in 1975 totaled 5,779 acres. Additional land has since been added, bringing the park to its present size of approximately 18,000 acres.



While most of the high points average approximately 2,000 feet in elevation, Buzzard's Roost towers some 3,000 feet above the surrounding landscape. Elevations within the park itself, range from less than 1,200 feet at points along Jacob Fork River to 3,000 feet on Buzzard's Roost.

Water winding through the park to the Catawba River cuts deep into the terrain, forming rugged and steep slopes. The most spectacular feature in the park is High Shoals Falls on Jacob Fork River. Here, a torrent of water drops 80 feet over a cliff face of bare rock. In addition, Chestnut Knob offers tranquility and a magnificent view of surrounding peaks and ridges.



## Fishing

The park has many miles of streams where an angler can cast a line. All streams are designated trout waters and a special license is needed for fishing. Rules and regulations of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission apply.

## Nature's Classroom

Park rangers offer regularly scheduled educational and interpretive programs at the park. Contact the park office to arrange a special exploration of South Mountains State Park for your group or class.

Educational materials about South Mountains State Park have been developed for grades 4-7 and are correlated to North Carolina's competency-based curriculum in science, social studies, mathematics and English/language arts. The South Mountains program introduces students to stream and watershed ecology and focuses on aquatic life, water quality, and stewardship. A free teacher's booklet and workshop accompanies the program by request.

## Pack a Picnic

Dining outdoors is a special treat at South Mountains State Park. The Jacob Fork picnic area is accessible to people with disabilities and includes 19 picnic tables, nine grills and a restroom. A picnic shelter is also available with 12 picnic tables, a fireplace and two charcoal grills. This shelter can be reserved in advance. The Shinny Creek picnic area, a short half-mile walk from the Jacob Fork parking area, has four picnic tables and three grills. Cicero Branch parking area includes four picnic tables and the equestrian parking area has three picnic tables. There is also plenty of room at the visitor center to spread out a blanket to enjoy a picnic as well.

## Trails

**Hiking:** Choose from a variety of marked hiking trails at the park. All trails at South Mountains State Park are available to hikers.

The most popular trail, High Shoals Falls Loop Trail, travels one mile along the Jacob Fork River to the base of High Shoals Falls, a beautiful crystal-clear waterfall. The trail then continues to the top of the falls before looping around and returning to the parking area. The terrain can be rugged, so be observant of the trail and wear sturdy shoes.



An easier trail, originating at the Jacob Fork parking area, is the Hemlock Nature Trail. This short, wheelchair accessible trail travels along the Jacob Fork River. Eleven display areas along the trail explain the riparian environment of South Mountains and describe its plants and animals. In addition, two kiosk areas provide information about watersheds and trout-stream ecology.

Another popular but very strenuous trail is the two-mile long Chestnut Knob Trail, which leads to the Jacob Fork River Gorge and Chestnut Knob overlooks.

**Horseback riding:** There are 29 miles of equestrian trails at South Mountains State Park. Enjoy the 13-mile Sawtooth Trail Loop or ride one of the longer loops within the park. The equestrian trailhead is located at the west end of the equestrian parking area at Turkey Ridge Trail. Proof of a negative equine infectious anemia (Coggins) test is required.

**Mountain-bike trails:** South Mountains State Park is one of the few parks in the state parks system offering mountain bikers the chance to ride through the park. The 18-mile, strenuous loop trail follows old logging roads through the backcountry. Riders should be in good shape before attempting it.

# Camping

Sink gratefully into your sleeping bag after a day of hiking at South Mountains and fall asleep in the stillness of the forest.

**Backpack camping:** Twenty backpack camping sites are offered in six areas of the park. These sites are designated on the park map and hiking distances to each backpack camping site vary. Each camping area has a pit toilet located nearby. All sites are available on a first-come basis.

Upon arrival at the park, backpackers should proceed to the Jacob Fork parking area and register using the board beside the office door. All supplies must be carried to the sites. Any water taken from nearby creeks and streams should be treated prior to use. Below is a listing of the backpack campsites and the distance between the campsites and the Jacob Fork parking area.

Trail Name	Number of Miles to Campsites
Upper Falls Trail	1.4
Shinny Creek	1.2
Sawtooth Trail	2.5
Jacob Branch	3.8
Fox Trail	4.9
Murray Branch	5.4

**Family camping:** Primitive family camping is available a half-mile east of the Jacob Fork parking area. Eleven campsites include a picnic table and fire ring with grill. One site is wheelchair accessible. Pit toilets and drinking water are located in the campground. Family campsites are available on a first-come basis. When you arrive in the campground, set up in an unoccupied site and a park ranger will register you near the park's closing hour.

**Group camping:** Group camping is available at all backpacking campsites except Upper Falls. Reservations for organized groups may be made by contacting the park office. Currently car camping for groups is not available.

**Equestrian camping:** The equestrian campground at South Mountains State Park is adjacent to the equestrian parking area and includes 15 primitive campsites, a 33-stall barn and a bathhouse with hot showers and flush toilets.

Sites in this area should be reserved by contacting the park office. Campers without reservations must confirm site availability with park staff before occupying a site.

Proof of a negative equine infectious anemia (Coggins) test is required for horses using the barn.



## Flora and Fauna

Observe different forest types in the beautiful woodlands of South Mountains State Park, including pure conifer, mixed conifer, hardwood and climax hardwood forests. This relatively undeveloped area is a splendid example of ecologies from the upper piedmont to the mountains. Oak, hickory and a variety of pines are the predominant species in the park.

Walk along the park's numerous streams and enjoy a variety of beautiful wildflowers, including Jack-in-the-pulpit, lady slipper and foam flowers. Mountain laurel and rhododendron are also present.

Wildlife is abundant in the forests of South Mountains, though many of the animals go unseen by the casual visitor. Salamanders, frogs and toads reside in the moist areas of the park. Common reptiles include eastern fence lizards, skinks and a variety of small snakes. Though most of the snakes in the park are harmless and rarely encountered, the venomous copperhead and timber rattlesnake are present and hikers should exercise caution.

The park comes alive with a symphony of chirping during the spring and summer months. More than 60 species of birds are known to nest at South Mountains. While most species found in the park are typical of the western piedmont, other common species include the ruffed grouse, black-throated green warbler and rose-breasted grosbeak. You may also find Acadian flycatchers, common crows, Carolina chickadees, wood thrushes, red-eyed vireos, oven birds, hooded warblers, indigo buntings and Eastern towhees. Common ravens have also nested on rock ledges near High Shoals Falls.

White-tailed deer, black bears and many smaller mammals also call the park home. Woodchucks may be seen along grassy roadsides and chipmunks inhabit the forests along with their larger cousin, the gray squirrel. Raccoons and Virginia opossums forage along the streams. Also, several species of small rodents, shrews and eastern moles are South Mountains forest inhabitants that are seldom encountered by park visitors.

# Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Our regulations are posted throughout the park for the protection of our visitors and our park. Help preserve our natural resources by observing the following:

❑ The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.

❑ Firearms and fireworks are not permitted.

❑ The removal of any plant, animal, rock or mineral is prohibited.

❑ All North Carolina state parks are wildlife preserves. Hunting and trapping are not permitted.

❑ Fishing is permitted only during park hours and regulations of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission are enforced.

❑ Fires are permitted only in designated areas.

❑ Do not litter. Help maintain a clean environment for other visitors.

❑ North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park. The park speed limit is 25 mph unless otherwise posted.

❑ Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.

❑ As a courtesy to other campers, observe the posted campground quiet hours.

❑ Camping is allowed in designated areas by permit only.

## For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, please remember these safety tips.

❑ Venomous snakes, poison ivy and ticks may be encountered along park trails. Exercise caution.

❑ Dress properly. Check with park employees regarding weather and terrain.

❑ Remember to bring water for both you and your pets.

❑ Be sure to plan your hike so that you avoid being caught by darkness and exit the park or return to your campsite before park closing.

❑ At the observation of an approaching electrical storm, return to your vehicle or the nearest park building immediately. Do not remain on rock outcrops, in open fields or in the forest under tall trees.

❑ When hiking, stay on designated trails and away from cliff faces and waterfalls. Steep drop-offs, poisonous plants and unstable footing exist beyond the trail.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or for an explanation of park rules.

The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation is a division of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

William G. Ross Jr.  
Secretary



Michael F. Easley  
Governor



# Welcome!

Nestled deep in the woods, South Mountains State Park is the perfect place to enjoy nature. Here, you can see a majestic mountain range peeking out from the gently rolling landscape of the piedmont.

The park includes elevations up to 3,000 feet, a waterfall dropping 80 feet and more than 40 miles of trails. From equestrian camping to trout fishing, mountain biking to picnicking, South Mountains State Park offers a rugged terrain perfect for a number of activities.

Visit one of the state's most rugged parks. Hike the trail to High Shoals Falls to witness the roar of the waterfall as it pours into a large pool. Backpack through the woodlands for primitive camping. Fish for trout in miles of mountain streams, or bicycle along the 18-mile mountain bike loop.



## Information

To learn more about South Mountains State Park, contact:

South Mountains State Park  
3001 South Mountains State Park Ave.  
Connelly Springs, NC 28612  
(828) 433-4772  
denr.dpr.south.mountains@lists.ncmail.net  
www.ncparks.gov

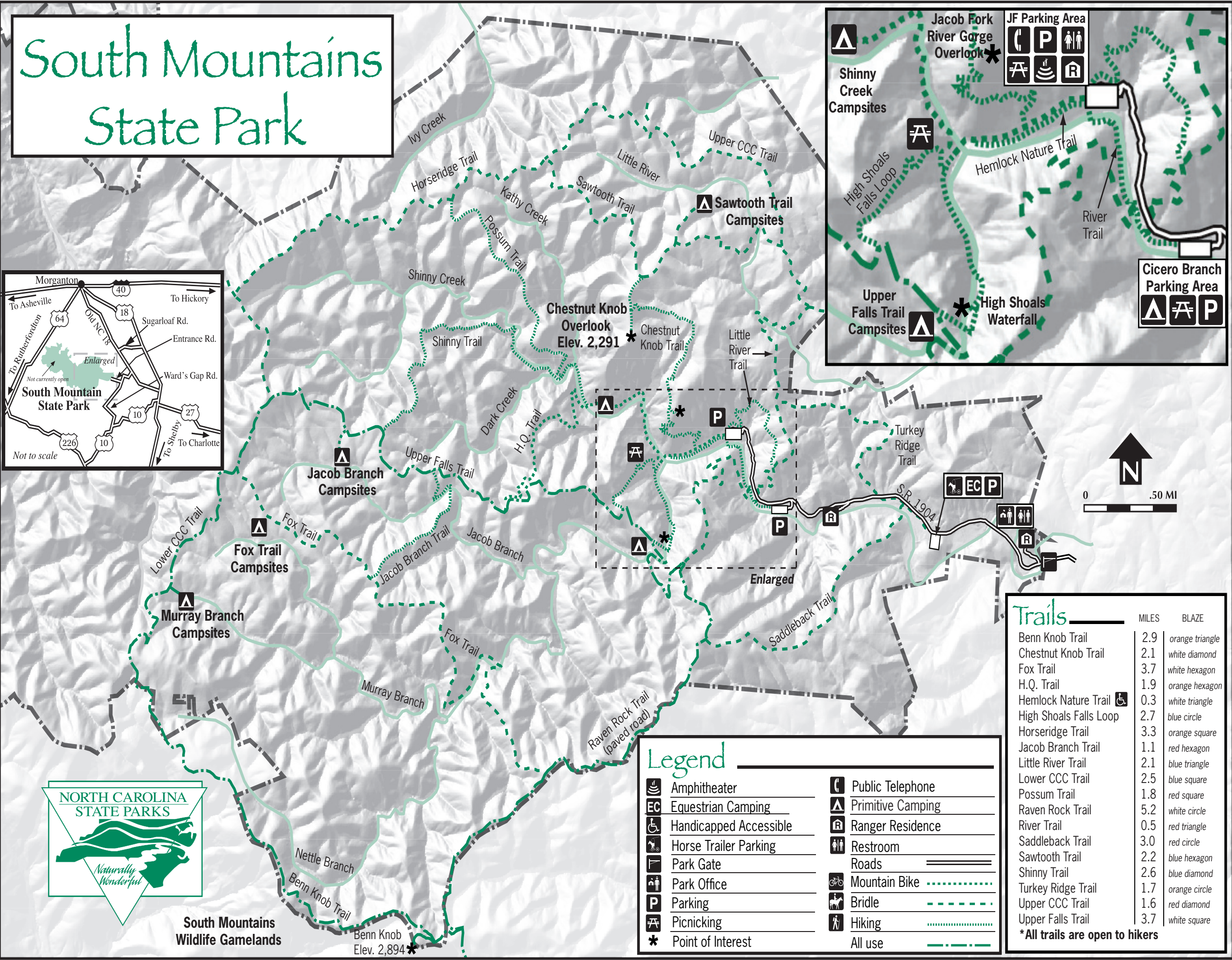
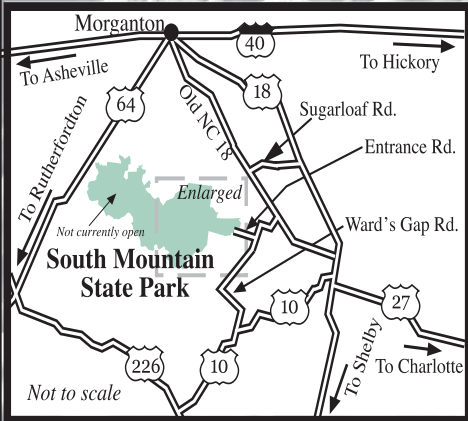
Discover other North Carolina state parks and recreation areas, contact:

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources  
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Raleigh, NC 27699-1615  
(919) 733-4181

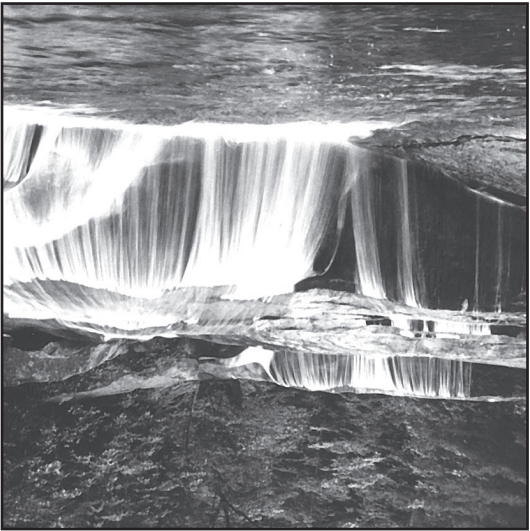
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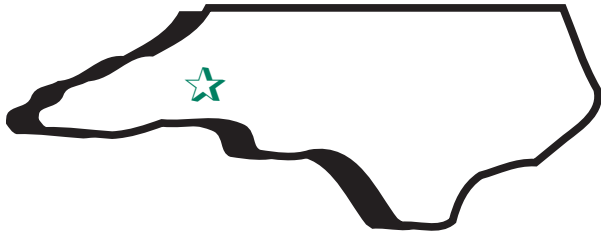
# South Mountains State Park



N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



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South Mountains State Park is located in Burke County, 18 miles south of Morganton. From I-40, turn south on N.C. 18, travel nine miles and make a right turn onto SR 1913 (Sugarloaf Road). Turn left on Old N.C. 18. Travel four miles and turn right onto SR 1901 (Ward's Gap Road). The park is on SR 1904 (South Mountains State Park Ave.).

## Park Hours

November - February	8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March - May, September & October	8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
June - August	8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day	